



Drawing by Lithuanian artist Antanas Kamieliauskas.

The Lithuanian Holocaust & Nationalism

The acceptance of violence and participation in genocide.

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Abstract

Historians often divide the Holocaust in Lithuania into three major phases: *June – December 1941*, *January 1942 – March 1943*, and *April 1943 – July 1944*. Defined by its systematic use of violence, the first phase marked the annihilation of 80% of Jews living in Lithuania. Focusing on the escalation of antisemitic violence between June – December 1941, this research attempts to understand *why* the Holocaust in Lithuania reached such extremes. Furthermore, Lithuanian-Nazi collaboration is examined to determine the ideological motivations of participation in genocide. The rise of Lithuanian nationalism during the Soviet occupation (1940 – 1941) and its role in contributing to the Holocaust is also considered. Additionally, the ‘bystander behavior’ of ethnic-Lithuanians is discussed in order to challenge traditional notions of passivity. Therefore, this thesis is not a chronological outline of the Lithuanian Holocaust, rather it is aimed at contributing to the plethora of genocidal explanations. It is argued that anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania was a reaction to the developing political tensions and regimes of oppression in Eastern Europe in the early-1940s. Lithuanian nationalists, in their pursuit for national independence, sided with Nazi Germany in hopes of escaping Soviet repression. In turn, Nazi authorities exploited the moral crisis that had emerged within the Lithuanian national consciousness and perpetuated genocidal tendencies.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

As Ian Kershaw famously noted: “The road to Auschwitz was built by hatred, but paved with indifference.”¹ The purpose of this thesis is to understand, but not to excuse, this *indifference* in regard to the Holocaust in Lithuania, which occurred between 1941 – 1944 and resulted in the tragic murder of approximately 195,000 Lithuanian Jews.² The origins of genocide in Lithuania are multifaceted and complex, while its history is bloody and shameful. Moreover, the collective memory of Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust remains controversial and highly contested in both the contemporary political and social national landscapes.

Historiography

Following Adolf Hitler’s downfall in 1945, various interpretations of the Holocaust have emerged. Traditionally, these interpretations are often labeled as either *intentionalist* or *functionalist*. Intentionalism stresses the “Hitler-centrism” of the Holocaust and argues that Hitler had a predetermined plan or “programme”, which “in all essentials he held to consistently from the early 1920s down to his suicide in the Berlin bunker in 1945.”³ Intentionalist theories claim that Hitler’s antisemitic obsession guided Nazi policy and mobilized his ideological followers.⁴ In contrast, functionalism offers a structural explanation for the Holocaust and focuses on the “power-structure” and the “cumulative radicalization” that occurred within the Nazi regime.⁵ Moreover, functionalists outline the economic and military influences on the decision to implement the Final Solution.⁶ Author Daniel Goldhagen champions an extreme intentionalist approach in *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, in which he argues that the Holocaust was a “national project” that was supported by “genocidal communities” in Germany.⁷ When initially published, this controversial approach sparked heavy debate; criticizing Goldhagen’s work, functionalist historian Hans Mommsen contends that the Holocaust ultimately resulted from a combination of complex structures and “spiraling

¹ Ian Kershaw, “The Persecution of the Jews and German Popular Opinion in the Third Reich”, *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 26, no. 1 (January 1989): 281.

² Alfonsas Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius, LT: "Eugrimas" Publishing House, 2013): 193.

³ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015): 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ A. D. Moses, “Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics,” *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (1998): 195.

radicalization.”⁸ Nonetheless, other interpretations have attempted to stray away from a German-centric approach to the Holocaust and consider other factors that potentially contributed to mass violence.

Most notable is historian Timothy Snyder’s distinctive approach of examining the relationship between Hitler and Stalin as an instigator of genocide in Eastern Europe during the mid-twentieth century. Outlined in *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, Snyder argues that the Holocaust was primarily carried out in “the bloodlands” of Eastern Europe as a result of two dictatorships, and not in the concentration camps as traditional assumed.⁹ Snyder’s main premise is that both “Hitler and Stalin shared a certain politics of tyranny; they brought about catastrophes, blamed the enemy of their choice, and then used the death of millions to make the case that their policies were necessary and desirable.”¹⁰ Although highly praised, Snyder’s thesis is not immune to critique. Historian Mark Mazower argues that Snyder’s approach largely downplays local-Nazi collaboration and does not consider the role of indigenous politics.¹¹ Moreover, he claims that Snyder underestimates the importance of various local ideologies in facilitating the Holocaust.¹² As outlined in *Hitler’s Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe*, Mazower argues that local collaboration was essential for the Germans in the occupied eastern territories for the one main reason: the Final Solution.¹³ Significantly, Mazower states that “members of Baltic fascist groups were a key source of enthusiastic recruits, and many of these rivalled the Nazis in their blending of antisemitism and anti-communism.”¹⁴ Arguably, local initiatives had considerable influence in determining the final fate of Europe’s Jews.

This research contributes to this debate by providing an in-depth within-case analysis of the multiple factors that contributed to the Lithuanian Holocaust. The political structures and ideological influences that resulted in a zealous Lithuanian-Nazi collaboration are analyzed. Furthermore, this research stresses the importance of strong Lithuanian anti-Soviet attitudes, developed during the Soviet occupation of 1940, in the evolution of genocide and therefore, the role of Lithuanian nationalism in perpetuating the myth of Jewish Bolshevism is explored.

⁸ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 93.

⁹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (S.I.: Basic Books, 2022): 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1290.

¹¹ Mark Mazower, “Timothy Snyder’s Bloodlands,” *Contemporary European History* 21, no. 2 (2012): 123.

¹² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³ Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (England: Penguin, 2008): 966.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 967.

Additionally, the role of individual agency in enabling the Holocaust is crucial. Hence, this thesis answers the following question:

What were the political and social dynamic factors that led to the Lithuanian Holocaust and how did Lithuanian civilians facilitate the mass persecution of Jewish communities between 1941 – 1944?

Additional sub-questions include:

What effect did nationalism have on Lithuanian participation in genocide? How role did bystander behavior play in the Holocaust in Lithuania? How did the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940 influence the Nazi occupation between 1941 – 1944?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks that guide this thesis are outlined below:

1.1 A Theoretical Synthesis

While intentionalist and functionalist theories both present interesting perspectives, this research argues for a theoretical synthesis of the two. In order to understand the origins of the Lithuanian Holocaust, both ideological and structural factors are examined. In *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution*, historian Christopher Browning attempts to blur the lines between intentionalism and functionalism and argues that Hitler did not follow a predetermined plan for genocide. Rather, Browning traces a “succession of sometimes-contradictory measures and plans for getting rid of the Jews.”¹⁵ Furthermore, Browning disagrees that the Holocaust was a product of “cumulative radicalization” and attributes the Final Solution to a series of crucial decisions made in 1941, usually when Hitler was “elated and emboldened” by military victory.¹⁶ Moreover, Browning suggests that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were “ordinary men”, without strong ideological beliefs.¹⁷ Comparably, moderate functionalist historian Christoph Dieckmann focuses on the transition of genocide throughout Eastern Europe in 1941 – he argues that violence was initially a logistical response to food and supply shortages from local authorities; however, Hitler’s ideology had a larger, contextual influence.¹⁸ Dieckmann contends

¹⁵ Ruth Bettina Birn, “Review: The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution,” *German Politics & Society*, n.d.: 158.

¹⁶ Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching The Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 27.

¹⁷ Tom Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010): 215.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

that Hitler continuously upheld ethnic nationalist motives that impacted the political structure; Dieckmann notes that by 1939 Hitler had crucially “surrounded himself with people who fully agreed with him and supported his [antisemitic] doctrine.”¹⁹ Therefore, diverging from traditional functionalist theories, both Browning and Dieckmann acknowledge that Nazi ideology was prevalent within the ranks of the Third Reich and that Hitler was an influential figure in Nazi policy-making.

Moderate intentionalist historian Richard Breitman alleges that although there were “signs” of a “preliminary plan” for “getting rid of as many Jews as possible by force”, emigration was the initial solution.²⁰ However, in *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution*, Breitman argues that the Holocaust developed in January 1941 because of the ideological relationship between Hitler and Himmler. According to Breitman, by 1941 Himmler was not only concerned with “short-term, limited objectives” for the Third Reich, but also with “broader racial goals fully consistent with Hitler’s grandiose rhetoric.”²¹ Although Breitman argues that the Holocaust was ideologically linked with the invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941, he recognizes that there was a “decision-making process.”²² Historian Ian Kershaw also offers a moderate intentionalist approach – he argues that the momentum for the Holocaust developed from a “fatal combination of direction and initiative.”²³ In *Working Towards the Führer: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship*, Kershaw describes the Nazi political system as “working for the Führer”, in which “individuals decided on a specific course of action in the absence of central direction but according to the vague, and well-known, world historical goals of the Führer.”²⁴ Moreover, Kershaw emphasizes the local context of decision-making and argues that individual motives influenced the Holocaust.²⁵ Therefore, according to Kershaw, the Holocaust should be studied in the context of Nazi occupation policies.²⁶ While a combination of intentionalism and functionalism provides an overview of what factors led to the consensus that

¹⁹ Christoph Dieckmann and Vanagaitė Rūta, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022): 29.

²⁰ Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching The Final Solution*, 93.

²¹ Richard Breitman, “Plans for the Final Solution in Early 1941,” *German Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (October 1994): 487.

²² Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, 126.

²³ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the Final Solution was necessary; a more nuanced approach is needed to understand both *how* and *why* genocide was achieved.

1.2 Bystander Apathy

According to psychologist Ervin Staub's *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, there are three core concepts that contribute to genocide: *difficult life conditions*, *cultural-societal characteristics*, and *the role of bystanders*.²⁷ As an initial instigator, Staub links difficult life conditions, i.e., economic depression or political subjugation, to the potential rise of social hostility.²⁸ Persistent difficult life conditions can result in disassociation between groups and results in collective self-doubt.²⁹ Furthermore, hostility can strengthen if oppressed social groups perceive their mistreatment as unjust and disproportionate when compared to other social groups.³⁰ As a coping mechanism, social groups tend to blame others, or scapegoat, in order to diminish responsibility and establish social superiority.³¹ When combined, social superiority and collective self-doubt can result in the emergence of a radical and violent ideology, which further sustains the "continuum of destruction."³²

Staub stresses that nationalism originates from "shared traumas, suffering, and humiliation" and is strengthened under the influence of difficult life conditions.³³ Cultural devaluation and negative stereotypes are often crucial elements in nationalistic ideologies. Furthermore, cultural-societal characteristics can determine the power and effectiveness of violent ideologies and their leaders.³⁴ Staub argues that "people who have always been led by strong authorities are often unable to stand on their own in difficult times. Their intense need for support will incline them to give themselves over to a group and its leaders."³⁵ Furthermore, Staub insists that bystanders are essential to the development of genocide, claiming that "opposition from bystanders, based on moral or other grounds, can change the perspective of perpetrators and other bystanders,

²⁷ Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil the Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 58.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 70.

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

³¹ Ibid., 66.

³² Ibid., 67.

³³ Ibid., 71.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 72.

especially if the bystanders act at an early point on the continuum of destructions.”³⁶ Although individual agency can impede the progression of violence, Staub argues that unfortunately bystanders generally remain passive.³⁷

Methodology

Using the theoretical framework outlined above, this thesis explores the determining factors of the Lithuanian Holocaust in regard to Lithuanian-Nazi collaboration and the importance of individual agency in political conflict. Moreover, the role of ideology is examined through three central developments: 1) the rise of Lithuanian nationalism 2) the impact of Bolshevism on Lithuanian nationalism 3) the exploitation of anti-Soviet sentiments within the context of occupation. Therefore, this research also examines how the destructive relationship between Hitler and Stalin shaped the political and social landscapes of 1940s Eastern Europe. However, it is argued that national politics and ideology had a larger impact on these developments than traditionally assumed. This research focuses solely on Lithuanian history and does not attempt to compare between the Baltic States – i.e., Latvia and Estonia; this is due to the limited length of this research. Nonetheless, the Holocaust in Lithuania is a prime example of both *structure* and *intent*, of both *power* and *choice*.

2.1 Primary Sources

As this thesis examined the social influence of Lithuanian nationalism and focuses on the rise of antisemitism, newspaper publications, political statements, and witness accounts between 1940 – 1944 are reviewed in order to understand the perpetuation of the ‘Judeo-Bolshevik’ myth as a scapegoating mechanism. Political statements made by contemporary nationalist Kazys Škirpa and *The Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas* (LAF) are reviewed. Therefore, publications from the leading contemporary newspaper *Į Laisvę* (Towards Freedom) are examined.³⁸ Local Lithuanian witness testimonies are sources from the Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Containing around 150 videotaped interviews in Lithuanian, this collection sheds an important light on Holocaust remembrance within Lithuania. Moreover,

³⁶ Staub, *The Roots of Evil the Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, 75.

³⁷ Ervin Staub, “Genocide and Mass Killing: Origins, Prevention, Healing and Reconciliation,” *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000): 371.

³⁸ Mantas Bražiūnas, “The Darkest Page in the History of Lithuanian Journalism: Anti-Semitism in Legal Press During the Second Half of 1941,” *Science Journal (Communication and Information)*, no. 10 (2016): 146.

further witness accounts and nationalist material is found in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews* by Alvydas Nikžentaitis, et al., *Undigested Past: The Holocaust in Lithuania* by Robert van Voren, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust* by Alfonsas Eidintas and *Our People: Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust*, by Rūta Vanagaitė.

2.2 Secondary Sources

Due to the limited scope of this research, secondary sources are used to outline the history of Lithuanian-Jewish relations during the Tsarist occupation and throughout the interwar period of 1918 –1940. Therefore, publications such as *The History of Lithuania*, by historian Alfonsas Eidintas et al., *Enemies for A Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania Under the Tsars*, by Darius Staliūna., and *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus 1569 – 1999*, by Timothy Snyder are used. Secondary sources are also used to document the timeline of both the German invasion and the progression of violence that subsequently followed in early 1940s Lithuania. Thus, publications such as *How Did it Happen? Understanding the Holocaust*, by historian Christoph Dieckmann and Rūta Vanagaitė, and *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, by Alfonsas Eidintas, are considered. Additional publications further analyzing the chosen theoretical frameworks are used. Along with the publications already mentioned, these include *Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War* by Laurence Rees, *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931 – 1945*, by Richard Overy and *Ordinary Men* and *The Origins of the Final Solution*, by Christopher Browning.

Chapter 2. The History of Lithuanian-Jewish Relations 1918 – 1941

Prior to the outbreak of WWII, Vilnius was often referred to as the “Jerusalem of the North” – a multicultural city in which Jews flourished culturally, spiritually and economically.³⁹ Having been granted a charter by Vytautas the Great in 1388, Jews were officially formed into a class of freemen “on equal footing with the lesser nobles, boyars, and other free citizens”, and as a result Vilnius developed into a “symbol of Jewish stability and cultural prosperity.”⁴⁰ As Snyder notes, “from the middle of the sixteenth until the middle of the twentieth century, Vilnius was a center of Jewish civilization... the capital of a great multinational realm.”⁴¹ However, although Lithuanians and Jews coexisted, mutual understanding was rare and both communities remained predominantly isolated.⁴² Under Tsarist rule (1795 – 1915), Lithuanians and Jews continued to live “*beside* one another” rather than “*with* each other” and negative stereotypes developed.⁴³ While Jews considered Lithuanians to be an “undeveloped primitive rural society”, Lithuanians approached Jews with religious skepticism and mistrust.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, antisemitism in Lithuania “was neither wide-spread nor frequent.”⁴⁵ According to Saulius Sužiedėlis, at the end of the nineteenth century, Lithuanian-Jewish relations could be described as “complicated and contradictory, but not predominantly antagonistic.”⁴⁶ However, the self-deterministic world of post-Versailles Europe introduced new concepts of economic competition and national identity that considerably intensified ethnic rivalries and transformed Lithuanian-Jewish relations.⁴⁷ This chapter outlines the development of Lithuania-Jewish relations during the interwar period and the subsequent Soviet occupation between 1940-1941.

³⁹ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus: 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 5.

⁴⁰ Robert van Voren, *Undigested Past the Holocaust in Lithuania* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011): 9.

⁴¹ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus*, 16.

⁴² Nikžentaitis Alvydas, Stefan Schreiner, and Staliūnas Darius, *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)* (Rodopi, 2004): 120.

⁴³ Van Voren, *Undigested Past the Holocaust in Lithuania*, 120.

⁴⁴ Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest etc.: Central European University Press, 2015): 18.

⁴⁵ Nikžentaitis, et al., *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)*, 120.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

2.1 'A Nationalistic State, Not A Nation of Nationalities': The Interwar Period

While Lithuania emerged as an independent state in 1918, political and economic instability plagued the young nation.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Lithuanian leadership, lacking military power and struggling to unite all the ethnographical Lithuanian lands, was desperate to retain Vilnius as the nation's capital. As Sužiedėlis suggests, Lithuanian leaders were “acutely aware of the need to convince the international community of the viability of their state, and seeking recognition within the new Wilsonian order under construction at the Versailles, they strove to present their nation as a paragon of liberal democracy.”⁴⁹ National policy regarding the Jewish minority was based on a “wide-ranging cultural autonomy” – these principles were outlined in a declaration issued by the Lithuanian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and confirmed by the 1922 Lithuanian Constitution.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Jewish autonomy provoked opposition amongst Catholic, conservative, and nationalistic circles, who considered “ethnic home rule the creation of a ‘state within the state’.”⁵¹ Anti-leftists criticized Lithuanian leadership for its “expansive attitudes towards the cultural development of minorities” and called for the exclusion of Jews from positions of authority.⁵² Moreover, by the mid-1920s primitive leaflets, drawing on fears of Bolshevism and Jewish “domination” began to circulate.⁵³ In response, President Antanas Smetona issued a memorandum in 1926, which affirmed that “Jews should be allowed to participate in the government...without harm to the state’s independence...since they had neither dangerous foreign sponsors nor irredentist claims.”⁵⁴ While the political climate was relatively safe for Jews in interwar Lithuania, economic issues led to the emigration of nearly 14,000 Lithuanian Jews between 1928 – 1939.⁵⁵

Economic tensions between Lithuanians and Jews emerged predominantly as a result of both the economic crash of 1929 and the post-WWI changing urban landscape – while in 1897 the Lithuanian populations of Kaunas and Šiauliai barely reached 6.6% and 27.8% respectively, by 1923, 59% of the population of Kaunas and 70% of Siauliai were comprised of ethnic

⁴⁸ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 152.

⁴⁹ Nikžentaitis, et al., *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)*, 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Lithuanians.⁵⁶ As Eidintas accounts: “as Lithuanians flooded into cities and got jobs in industry and commerce, especially when the economic crisis started, competition became stronger.”⁵⁷ By the 1930s, organizations such as the *Lietuvių verslininkų sąjunga* (LVS; Union of Lithuanian Businessmen) and *Jaunlietuviai* (Young Lithuanians) were aggressively demanding a “Lithuania for Lithuanians.”⁵⁸ These organizations were opposed to all foreign economic participation and regarded Jews as economic tyrants and as the major obstacle to the “modernization of Lithuanian society.”⁵⁹ Moreover, the militant LVS labeled Smetona as a philo-Semite and complained that the Lithuanian government “favored Jews and did too little for *native* businessmen.”⁶⁰ However, on the surface the LVS were against violence towards Jews and asserted that Lithuanian will achieve 85% of economic participation through a “natural evolution.”⁶¹ The ruling Lithuania elite was against the nationalistic rhetoric of the LVS and the *Jaunlietuviai* and emphasized importance of “moral competition.”⁶² Furthermore, Smetona was determined to uphold the constitutional pledge regarding minorities and famously declared that there was “enough room for everyone” in independent Lithuania.⁶³ Nevertheless, Smetona could not deny that antimerism was on the rise amongst the resentful younger Lithuanian generation, despite attempts to create ethnic unity. As described by contemporary writer Jokūbas Josadė:

*“...Jews and Lithuanians lived alongside one another in many townships – on the same street, and frequently, in the same building. All that should have brought them closer to one another, but that did not happen. The conversations were different, the cultures, the religions, the customs, and most importantly – the psychologies were entirely different, including nervous sensitivities, reactions to life phenomena, temperament, and much more.”*⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Alfonsas Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust* (Vilnius: Taurapolis, 2012): 69.

⁵⁷ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 190.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Nikžentaitis, *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)*, 127.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 190.

⁶⁴ Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 69.

The subsequent Soviet occupation would further cement antisemitic attitudes and result in the formation of a Lithuanian national consciousness that was severely bruised and easily manipulated.

2.2 The Myth of 'Judeo-Bolshevism' within Soviet Lithuania

Between 1940 – 1941, Lithuania fell under Soviet rule, during which *Sovietization* was instituted at an alarmingly rapid pace. While the impact of *Sovietization* on ethnic Lithuanians is discussed more in-depth in the next chapter, it did result in the reinforcement of anti-Jewish national resentment and led to the development of the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism. Prior to the Soviet occupation, the Lithuanian Community Part (LCP) was a relatively minor underground political party, consisting of an estimated 1,600 communists.⁶⁵ However, after the Soviets seized control, LCP membership naturally increased and an assumption developed that the majority of those joining the LCP were Jews.⁶⁶ Overall, the percentage of Jews within the LCP grew to 36%, whereas in Kaunas the number of Jews in the LCP reached 70-76%.⁶⁷ While Kaunas was an unusual development, data confirms that Jews did not form the majority of any branch in the Soviet administration.⁶⁸ For instance, the People's *Seimas* comprised of 67 Lithuanians, 3 Poles, 2 Belarusians, 1 Russian, 1 Latvian, and 4 Jews.⁶⁹ In fact, Jewish LCP membership eventually began to decline due to antisemitic attitudes amongst the Lithuanian communists who believed Jews to be "exploiters" and by June of 1941, of the 4,703 members of the Communist Party, 46.6% were Lithuanian and 12.6% were Jews.⁷⁰ Thus, Jews made up a minority within the Soviet political framework and had relatively little influence on policies of *Sovietization*. Yet, the Soviet occupation was often referred to by ethnic Lithuanians as the *Jewish regime*.⁷¹

The antisemitic myth of Judeo-Bolshevism in Lithuania was cultivated under the idea that Jews favored the Soviet regime over an independent Lithuania. This idea manifested in the early days of the occupation as the Red Army stormed into Lithuanian towns and villages. In his political

⁶⁵ Alfonsas Eidintas, "A 'Jew-Communist' Stereotype in Lithuania, 1940-1941," *Lithuanian Political Science Yearbook*, no. 01 (2000): 10.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁹ Van Voren, *Undigested Past the Holocaust in Lithuania*, 53.

⁷⁰ Liudas Truska, "Preconditions of the Holocaust: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of the Soviet Occupation (1940-1941)," *The International Commission*, June 2016, 10.

⁷¹ Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 122.

memoirs, writer Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius recalled that when Soviet troops marched into Kaunas, “a crowd of sorrowful Lithuanians were crying, only the Jews were joyous, and their women would smother the Red Army soldiers with flowers.”⁷² Hypocritically, Krėvė-Mickevičius served as the deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Soviet People’s Government.⁷³ Similarly, contemporary historian Zenonas Ivinskis noted: “People, most of the Jews, gathered around the tanks and, it seems as if ingratiating and as if giving away any kind of self-respect, pretended to be the true henchmen of the Bolshevik militaries...herds of Jewish girls and Jews, all below 18 years of age, greeted every passing car as if they were unchained; they shouted, sang, swung their hands, and screamed.”⁷⁴ This was arguably due to the assumption that Jews viewed the Soviet regime as ‘less evil’ than the alternative Nazi regime.⁷⁵ Writer and politician Mykolas Krupavičius remarked in his diary:

“Once the Soviet Army entered Lithuania, the Jews set to express their arrogance. Sometimes it happens that irresponsible element of the Jewish society, youth for the most part, walk throughout the city streets in groups and make it difficult for Lithuanians to move freely on the sidewalk. Besides, one can hear complaints on the side of Lithuanians that the Jews threaten them with the expression like: ‘Now we are the masters.’”⁷⁶

Arguably, Lithuanian political elites targeted Jews in order to reconcile with their own sense of humiliation over the Soviet defeat of Lithuania.⁷⁷ Moreover, the image of Jews as ungrateful and deceitful was reinforced further by the pro-Soviet demonstrations held throughout Lithuania. According to Lithuanian witnesses, during a demonstration organized in Jurbarkas, “Jews and communists attended that demonstration voluntarily; some government officials attended out of fear. Jews marched with arms entwined, chanting about the glory of Stalin and the Russians. Lithuanians walked along very sadly with heads bent low – they looked like they were being driven to prison.”⁷⁸ Moreover, on July 21, 1940, the Lithuanian State Security Department issued a report regarding two mass demonstrations, organized in Eišiškės and Vilnius. According to the

⁷² Truska, “Preconditions of the Holocaust: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of the Soviet Occupation (1940-1941)”, 1.

⁷³ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 215.

⁷⁴ Eidintas, “A ‘Jew-Communist’ Stereotype in Lithuania, 1940-1941”, 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁷ Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, 481.

⁷⁸ Eidintas, “A ‘Jew-Communist’ Stereotype in Lithuania, 1940-1941”, 12.

report, in Eišiškės some “200 participated, most of them Jews. These Jews used the words of the speakers to express their happiness that the Red Army had liberated Lithuania, and that [the country] would become Lithuania SSR.”⁷⁹ On the same day, a large demonstration was organized at Lukiškės Square in Vilnius, in which “a big crowd gathered, holding portraits and pictures of Stalin. Few Lithuanians and Poles participated; most were Jews – now communists.”⁸⁰ Against the backdrop of repression, Lithuanians perceived this as a sign of ultimate betrayal and consequently, in the minds of Lithuanians, being Jewish “became synonymous with being a communist.”⁸¹ The Soviet occupation was determinantal for Lithuanian-Jewish relations; the immersion of Judeo-Bolshevism myth within Lithuanian society produced the ideal conditions for the radicalization of Lithuanian nationalism.

⁷⁹ Eidintas, “A ‘Jew-Communist’ Stereotype in Lithuania, 1940-1941”, 19.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Van Voren, *Undigested Past the Holocaust in Lithuania*, 51.

Chapter 3: The Rise of Lithuanian Nationalism

Arguably, nationalism emerges from a disconnect between the ruling elite and institutions and the “culture of a people.”⁸² This assumption is magnified under the conditions of foreign occupation, in which occupiers lack the necessary “linguistic, religious, and nationality credentials” and, therefore, are likely to become a target for nationalist agitation.⁸³ Successful nationalist campaigns provoke anxiety around “national enemies” and lead to the creation of interest groups that favor aggressive policies.⁸⁴ Furthermore, political elites use nationalism to obtain “mass cooperation for the achievement of their goals.”⁸⁵ While the roots of Lithuanian nationalism can be traced back to the interwar period, momentum was noticeably gained during the Soviet occupation between 1940 – 1941. Lithuanian nationalists exploited widespread resentment towards Soviet authorities in order to arouse an anti-Soviet national movement. Inspired by Fascist ideology, these nationalists eagerly adopted an increasingly antisemitic national framework and nurtured the perception that “the Jewish Communists are destroying us” – this concept was further cemented in the national consciousness as policies of *Sovietization* became increasingly violent. In turn, Nazi leadership used this in the Reich’s advantage, which resulted in the escalation of violence.⁸⁶ However, Lithuanian nationalists and Nazi authorities had exceedingly different ambitions that often clashed, with ethnic Lithuanians predominantly supporting national interests. Therefore, imperative to understanding the Holocaust in Lithuania, this chapter examines the development of Lithuanian nationalism within an occupational context. Moreover, it discusses how national self-interests motivated Lithuanians to accept the Wehrmacht as liberators, who in turn contributed to radicalization of violence in Lithuania.

3.1 The Soviet Occupation and Repression

By 1940, it was evident that Hitler and Stalin were on a mission to divide up the European continent between the two dictators. As Eidintas stresses, “many countries had already been occupied by the Nazis, Poland was shared by predators and the Baltic countries therefore

⁸² M. Moaddel, M. Tessler, and R. Inglehart, “Foreign Occupation and National Pride: The Case of Iraq,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (June 2008): 679.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 679.

⁸⁴ Gretchen Schrock-Jacobson, “The Violent Consequences of the Nation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 5 (2012): 826.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

understood that their turn was coming.”⁸⁷ As predicted, Lithuania was officially invaded by the Soviet Union on June 15, 1940.⁸⁸ The Lithuanian political elite did very little to stop the Red Army, as they believed that “submission could rescue people from repression.”⁸⁹ However, *Sovietization* was inevitable and on June 17, 1940, the interwar government was replaced by the puppet People’s Government, which comprised of communist-minded intellectuals who had openly opposed the interwar administration.⁹⁰ Immediately, all non-communist organizations and newspapers were banned and on June 25, 1940, the Communist Party of Lithuania (LCP) officially became the nation’s sole political party.⁹¹ The situation worsened on July 3, 1940, when the Law on the Reform of the Lithuanian Army was implemented, which transformed the Lithuanian Army into the People’s Army and, subsequently, into the 29th Rifle Corps of the Red Army – Lithuania was rendered completely defenseless.⁹² A sham election was hastily held on July 14 – 15, 1940, for the People’s *Seimas* (Parliament), in which candidates could be nominated only by the LCP, the Communist Youth League, or communist-led trade unions.⁹³

Unsurprisingly, all 79 nominated candidates were communist-sympathizers and represented the Lithuanian Labor People’s Union (LLPU).⁹⁴ Individuals who openly criticized Soviet elections were deemed ‘enemies of the people’ - between July 11 - 12, 1940, several hundred of Lithuanian nationals were accused of political offenses and arrested.⁹⁵ According to official Soviet data, 95% of the electorate participated in the July 1940 elections, with the LLPU winning 99.91% of the vote.⁹⁶ On July 21, 1940, the newly elected People’s *Seimas* declared Lithuania to be a Soviet Socialist Republic and annexation was complete on August 3, 1940, when a 20-member delegation traveled to Moscow with the request that Lithuania be officially incorporated into the Soviet Union.⁹⁷ Subsequently, the Lithuanian administrative system was completely transformed to fit into the Soviet model; on August 25, 1940, the People’s *Seimas* was renamed the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR, and the Council of People’s Commissar replaced

⁸⁷ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 214.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 215.

⁸⁹ Truska, “Preconditions of the Holocaust: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of the Soviet Occupation (1940-1941)”, 37.

⁹⁰ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 216.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 217.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 218.

the People's Government as the executive power of Lithuania.⁹⁸ The Soviet Constitution, which was a replica of Stalin's 1936 Constitution, was adopted and the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) was established – since the NKVD policies were based on terror, arrests, imprisonments, and deportations became frequent.⁹⁹ Along with the political elites, many *kulaks* (wealthy peasants) were branded 'class enemies' and either arrested or deported to Siberia.¹⁰⁰ Eliminating *kulaks* was an integral component of the Soviet nationalization policy and the establishment of collective farmlands – "kolkhozy".¹⁰¹

Between June 1940 - May 1941, the NKVK arrested 6,606 Lithuanian political leaders and entrepreneurs - around half would eventually be deported to Soviet gulags.¹⁰² According to Vanagaitė and Dieckmann, the Soviet leadership came to a conclusion that in the event of a German attack, many locals would side with the Germans against the Soviet state and, therefore, to avoid this, deportations would be necessary.¹⁰³ As a result, on July 6, 1940, the Director of the State Security Department, Antanas Sniečkus, approved the order for the 'operational liquidation plan', which authorized the arrest and deportation of those suspected of anti-Soviet activities.¹⁰⁴ The Soviet authorities began organizing the future mass deportations of Lithuanians in early October 1940 – around 30,000 individuals were labeled by the NKVD as "people who are considered potential enemies of the Soviet state", with the purpose of deportation.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as Rees notes, mass deportations were also a part "of a vengeful response to the [Nazi] crisis, in which the Soviet security forces turned on those internal enemies they considered a threat."¹⁰⁶ Consequently, between June 14 - 18, 1941, around 17,500 individuals were deported; although the majority were ethnic Lithuanians, around 13% of those deported were of Jewish descent and around 10% were Polish nationals.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, 5,060 children were deported - since the June 1941 deportations focused on families, the trains heading to the gulags were often full of aged parents as well as "the children of people who were thought to be dangerous."¹⁰⁸

⁹⁸ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 218.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 219.

¹⁰⁵ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 59.

¹⁰⁶ Laurence Rees, *Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War* (S.I.: Penguin Books, 2021): 282.

¹⁰⁷ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 220.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

Mass deportations had a debilitating impact on Lithuanian national consciousness; a moral crisis gripped the nation as Soviet violence, mass arrests and deportations degraded Lithuanian national dignity.¹⁰⁹ According to Eidintas, “this unprecedented mass deportations struck Lithuanians because the expulsion was aimed at the physical destruction of families...this expulsion was used to promote sentiments of ethnic intolerance by imposing responsibility for the expulsions on Jews.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Rees concludes that “the lie that the ‘Jews’ were behind this crime would subsequently be spread by the Nazi and others, a calumny that was especially cruel since a number of Jews have been among those deported from the Baltic States by the Soviet security forces.”¹¹¹ Crucially, when faced with misfortune, individuals tend to attempt to relate their suffering with historical misfortune in an attempt to determine a scapegoat – in the Lithuanian case this was the Jewish communities.¹¹² Liudas Truska suggests that “having gone through a lot of humiliation”, Lithuanians attempted to restore national pride and recover from the downfall by blaming Jews.¹¹³ Unable to assume responsibility, Lithuanians targeted their rage towards Jews and “created the myth about the Jews who destroyed the independence of the state, diligently assisted the occupant, tortured them and deported from the Homeland.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, the nationalism that emerged during the Soviet occupation was a radicalization of preexisting Lithuanian antisemitic assumptions and focused on the reinstatement of Lithuanian independence by means of fighting the Judeo-Bolshevik enemy.

3.2 The Role of the *Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas (LAF)*

The opportunity for Lithuanian nationalists to reclaim Lithuanian independence seemingly appeared as Nazi Germany prepared to attack the Soviet Union. According to Snyder, Hitler wanted the Germans to be an “imperial people” and, therefore, had always intended to conquer parts of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Overly concludes that Hitler was driven by an imperial desire “to expand future German living space in Eurasia.”¹¹⁶ Hitler maintained the idea that

¹⁰⁹ Truska, “Preconditions of the Holocaust: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of the Soviet Occupation (1940-1941)”, 37.

¹¹⁰ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 219.

¹¹¹ Rees, *Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War*, 283.

¹¹² Truska, “Preconditions of the Holocaust: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of the Soviet Occupation (1940-1941)”, 37.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, 397.

¹¹⁶ Richard Overly, *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931-1945* (New York: Viking, 2022): 57.

because of the size and racial solidarity of the German people, they had “the right to a greater living space.”¹¹⁷ However, in order to achieve this goal, greater manpower was required. According to Vanagaitė and Dieckmann, the German security forces argued that “to secure the zone behind the Soviet front, brutal terror would be necessary, and the only way to have enough manpower is to use armed local non-German forces.”¹¹⁸ Therefore, the Nazi leadership sought out the support of pre-established émigré communities in Berlin, often already “embittered by their experience with Soviet aggression.”¹¹⁹ The Germans favored the right-wing nationalists and utilized them during the invasion of the Soviet Union.¹²⁰ According to former diplomat and racialized nationalist, Kazys Škirpa, in early November 1940, he received “secret information from German military officials that Germany would attack the Soviet Union in the coming year.”¹²¹ Subsequently, on November 17, 1940, Škirpa established the short-lived *Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas* (Lithuanian Activist Front; LAF), which aimed to “unite the anti-Soviet underground movement in occupied Lithuania and reestablish independence with the help of the Germans.”¹²²

The LAF sought to restore prewar Lithuanian independence in accordance with Fascist features; the organization’s manifesto suggested that the Lithuanian nation “should be Christian, it should be radically nationalistic, and it should be about social justice.”¹²³ Founding member Antanas Maceina based the LAF’s program on his own fascist doctrine – *Tauta ir valstybė* (Nation and State).¹²⁴ Published in 1939, Maceina defines the nation as an organic community, created from ‘within’ and in which “persons of other nationalities have to be infused into the culture of the Nation until they are denationalized, relocated to some other country, or remain as guests under the rights of sanctuary.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, the program introduced the novel concept of a pure *Lithuanian race*.¹²⁶ While the LAF was in constant contact with German leadership, tensions developed over the Škirpa’s self-determination.¹²⁷ As Vanagaitė and Dieckmann note, “the

¹¹⁷ Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931-1945* (New York: Viking, 2022): 57.

¹¹⁸ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 54.

¹¹⁹ Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, 397.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 56.

¹²² Stanislovas Stasiulis, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: The Key Characteristics of Its History, and the Key Issues in Historiography and Cultural Memory,” *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 34, no. 1 (2019): 271.

¹²³ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 53.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹²⁵ Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 169.

¹²⁶ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 57.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

Germans wanted the LAF to report to the German army, while the LAF wanted to act more independently and immediately at the outbreak of war.”¹²⁸ Moreover, German war preparations centered around attempts to initiate an anti-Soviet revolt within Lithuania with the support of the LAF.¹²⁹ German leadership anticipated that Lithuanian rebels would “take over prisons, bridges, factories, railway networks, police stations, and other strategic sites...after the arrival of the German army, the rebels would no longer be required, and they would be expected to give up their weapons.”¹³⁰ Contrarily, Škirpa perceived the outbreak of war as an opportunity for a national uprising, resulting in a revolutionary, ethnically pure Lithuanian state.¹³¹ However, in order to maintain the support of the LAF, the German leadership assumed a vague stance regarding the re-establishment of Lithuanian independence; their messaging was: “The German leadership will evaluate appropriately what you have done for us, then we will see what we can do for it.”¹³² Purposely, they never outright promised independence to the LAF.

Furthermore, all orders coming from Berlin were supposed to be “perceived inside Lithuania as orders coming from the LAF, from Škirpa himself.”¹³³ Therefore, the national interests held by Škirpa were independent from German imperial goals and were the main motivator of Lithuanian submission to Nazi authority. Antisemitic proclamations produced by the LAF focused entirely on Lithuanian independence, enticing an anti-Soviet uprising, and on the theme that “Jews are Communists, and Communists are Jews.”¹³⁴ In December 1940, Lithuania partisans smuggled around 800 copies of a LAF proclamation, titled “From Bolshevik Slavery to a New Lithuania”, into Lithuania which asserted that “the countless ‘Jewish breed’, coddled by Smetona, had made Lithuania one of the most Jewish states in Europe.”¹³⁵ Moreover, it advocated for Lithuania to be “purified of Jews, parasites, and traitors”, and affirmed that the LAF “is determined to completely separate the Jews from the Lithuanian state.”¹³⁶ The undated proclamation, titled “To Lithuanian Activists”, aimed “to unite the Lithuanian nation and to cleanse the Lithuanian soil

¹²⁸ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 57.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³⁵ Mallory Needleman, “Lithuania under the Soviet Occupation, 1940–41: Observations and Operations by the United States,” *MCU Journal* 9, no. 2 (2018): 69.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

from fiends and Jews.”¹³⁷ According to Škirpa’s memoirs, this proclamation was delivered to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 18, 1941, and to the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) on April 19, 1941.¹³⁸ In another undated proclamation, Škirpa addressed Lithuanian Jews directly, warning them that their “history in the Lithuanian land that has lasted for five hundred years is now over...have no hopeful illusions!”¹³⁹ In a March 19, 1941, LAF circulated its highly notorious proclamation, titled “Dear Brothers in Slavery”, in which the Škirpa announces:

*“The hour of Lithuania’s liberation is close at hand. Immediately after the campaign from the west starts you will be informed on the radio...Local uprising must be started in the enslaved cities, towns, and villages of Lithuania or, to put more exactly, all power must be seized the moment the war begins. Local Communists and other traitors of Lithuania must be arrested at once, so that the many do not escape just punishment for their crimes (The traitor will only be pardoned only provided they prove beyond doubt that they have killed at least one Jew) ...Beginning today, inform the Jews that their fate has been decided upon. So that those who can better get out of Lithuania now, to avoid unnecessary victims.”*¹⁴⁰

According to Lithuanian historian Stanislovas Stasiulis, many consider this proclamation to be direct evidence that “the LAF planned the massacres of the Lithuanian Jews just before the outbreak of the war.”¹⁴¹ However, the authenticity of the sentence (*The traitor will only be pardoned only provided they prove beyond doubt that they have killed at least one Jew*) is highly questioned, because this is the only proclamation to outright encourage the extermination of the Jews. Lithuanian archives include several copies in which the statement is absent, and some historians claim that the statement might have been inserted when the proclamation was being multiplied in occupied Lithuania. To the contrary, witness statements, provided by anti-Soviet partisans Petras Bortkevicius and Feliksas Putruis, suggest that five copies of the proclamation containing the sentence reached Lithuania on March 23, 1941 – one of which was later found by

¹³⁷ Stasiulis, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: The Key Characteristics of Its History, and the Key Issues in Historiography and Cultural Memory”, 263.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 264.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

the NKVD during a partisan raid in Kretinga, Lithuania.¹⁴² Nonetheless, the proclamations that were disseminated throughout Lithuania are an example of how national interests motivated the actions of Lithuanian nationalists. Simultaneously, these independent national interests were necessary for Nazi authorities in securing support for the Soviet invasion. However, it was the LAF that managed to prepare Lithuania for the Holocaust; while antisemitic tensions might have eventually resulted in violence in Lithuania, the pace to which Jewish execution was normalized should be attributed partly to the mobilization efforts of the LAF.

3.3. 'The Jew Belongs to No Nation' – The 1941 June Uprising

Traditionally, the 1941 June Uprising is perceived in Lithuania as the ultimate symbol of the “destruction of the Soviet myth that Lithuania voluntarily joined the Soviet Union.”¹⁴³ Moreover, it is celebrated as a “justified, anticolonial, anti-Soviet movement.”¹⁴⁴ While this perception has merit, the June Uprising can also be viewed as a period of intersecting occupational violence, the Nazi exploitation of Soviet crimes, and the beginning of the destruction of the Lithuanian Jews. Furthermore, the uprising marked the downfall of the LAF and its goal of restoring Lithuanian independence. When the Wehrmacht attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the LAF ordered Lithuanian partisan units to prepare to fight for Lithuanian freedom. Against Nazi orders, the LAF broadcasted a speech on the Kaunas radio across Lithuania, in which Škirpa declares the restoration of the Lithuanian state:

“Lithuanian brothers and sisters, soon the hour we have been awaiting will come when the Lithuanian nation will get back its national freedom and restore the independence of the state of Lithuania. Today we rise to battle against one common two-faced enemy. That enemy is the Red Army, Russian Bolshevism...we are all convinced that the greatest and most hidden supporter of this enemy is the Jew...In the newly reconstituted Lithuania no Jew will have civil rights or the means of making a living. In this manner the mistakes

¹⁴² Stasiulis, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: The Key Characteristics of Its History, and the Key Issues in Historiography and Cultural Memory”, 263.

¹⁴³ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 224.

¹⁴⁴ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 68.

of the past and the evil deeds of the Jews will be corrected. In this manner strong foundations will be laid for the happy future and work of our Aryan nation."¹⁴⁵

An estimated 4,000 – 5,000 partisans were organized into 400 units across Lithuania – an additional 10,000 partisans would join during the first days of the war.¹⁴⁶ These partisans were ordered to wear white armbands so Germans would be able to recognize who was on their side – Lithuanian collaborators would be referred to as *white armbanders* throughout the remainder of the war. The *white armbanders* were initially instructed to maintain order, arrest “activists of the Soviet regime”, and fight for independence.¹⁴⁷ However, independence would never come. Desperately, the LAF established the Provisional Government (PG) on June 23, with Juozas Ambrazevičius acting as temporary Prime Minister.¹⁴⁸ The PG restored laws that were in effect before the Soviet occupation, not including the laws that applied to Jews, non-Lithuanians, and individuals “who actively contributed to actions against the interest of the Lithuanian nation.”¹⁴⁹ However, Škirpa was quickly put under house-arrest until the end of the war and attempts to reestablish independence during the uprising would prove futile as Nazi Germany gained control over Lithuania within just a week.¹⁵⁰ The PG was officially overthrown by the German leadership on July 23, 1940.¹⁵¹

Arguably, the predicament of Jews in Lithuania drastically worsened once the crimes committed by the fleeing Red Army were revealed. According to Sužiedėlis, “part of the outrage of the first days of the war included the crimes of the retreating Soviet regime.”¹⁵² Between June 22 – 23 evacuation orders were given by the Soviet authorities to evacuate 5,900 Lithuanian prisoners.¹⁵³ However, this plan was promptly abandoned as the Soviet Union proved to be utterly unprepared for an invasion and, therefore, the NKVD began “shooting the most dangerous of them.”¹⁵⁴ At the Pravieniškės camp near Kaunas, the Soviets executed 230 political prisoners; 76 political

¹⁴⁵ Vanagaitė Rūta and Efraim Zuroff, *Our People Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020): 100.

¹⁴⁶ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 66.

¹⁴⁷ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 222.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Van Voren, *Undigested Past the Holocaust in Lithuania*, 27.

¹⁵¹ Eidintas et al., *The History of Lithuania*, 223.

¹⁵² Christoph Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis Saulius, *Lietuvos Žydų Persekiojimas Ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą IR rudenį: Šaltiniai Ir analizė = the Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius: Margi Raštai, 2006): 10.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

prisoners were executed at the Rainian forest near Telšiai.¹⁵⁵ Similar executions were carried out throughout Lithuania, resulting in a total of 1,100 Lithuanian political prisoners killed.¹⁵⁶ According to Snyder, these Soviet atrocities were blamed on Jews, who were already perceived to be “responsible for Soviet repressions.”¹⁵⁷ Additionally, Snyder suggests that “Soviet mass murder provided the Germans with an occasion for propaganda...the Nazi line was that suffering under the Soviets was the fault of the Jews.”¹⁵⁸ Crucial to the success of the Holocaust was the ability of Germans to exploit local attitudes in places which recently experienced Soviet repression.¹⁵⁹ On June 25, Group leader Franz Stahlecker reported that “... it would be expedient, if they [Nazis] were to operate behind the scenes, at least in the beginning. Any unusually brutal means would unavoidably cause anxiety in the German populace, as well. For that reason, everything has to publicly appear, as though local residents have done everything at their own initiative, reacting naturally to the previous communist terror and pressure from Jews, which they have suffered for long decades.”¹⁶⁰

Therefore, with the help of partisan leader Algirdas Klimaitis, Stahlecker urged *white armbanders* to direct their anger against communists and activists, and the Jews of Kaunas.¹⁶¹ Ex-partisan Jonas Dainauskas recalled in 1992, “Stahlecker talked about the rampaging ‘Jewish commune’, the symbiosis of Jews and Bolsheviks, and how Jews had played a part in the arrests, imprisonments, tortures, and murders of Lithuanians; they had been helpers to the NKVD...He urged a cleansing from the Jewish pseudo-cultural heritage at once... Stahlecker repeated that Lithuanians must immediately, and best spontaneously, isolate all Jews in Kaunas and Lithuania...Lithuanians must come to a realization themselves as quickly as possible that it is in their own best interests to rid themselves of those bloodsuckers as fast as possible.”¹⁶² Seemingly, this proved successful, and on June 26, units of *white armbanders* entered the Jewish neighborhood of Viliampolė and began the murder of innocent Lithuanian Jews. As Stahlecker later recalled:

¹⁵⁵ Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis Saulius, *Lietuvos Žydų Persekiojimas Ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą IR rudenį: Šaltiniai Ir analizė = the Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* 10.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, 477.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 483.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 472.

¹⁶⁰ Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 178.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁶² Ibid., 183.

*“In Lithuania this was achieved for the first time by partisan activists in Kaunas. To our surprise it was not easy at first to set any large anti-Jewish pogrom in motion there. Klimaitis, the leader of the partisan unit...succeed in launching pogroms on the basis of advice given to him by a small, advanced detachment operating in Kaunas. In the first pogrom, the Lithuanian partisans did away with more than 1,500 Jews, set fire to several synagogues...and burned down a Jewish residential quarter consisting of about 60 houses. During the following nights, approximately 2,300 Jews were rendered harmless in a similar way. In other parts of Lithuania, similar actions followed the example of Kaunas, though on a smaller scale.”*¹⁶³

The Vilijampolė pogrom resulted in the brutal murdered of approximately 1,500 Jews, the destruction of several synagogues and the looting of approximately 60 Jewish homes.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, the violence is attributed solely to Lithuanian participation. As Holocaust survivor Leib Garfunkel recalled:

*“Lithuanian partisans and ordinary Lithuanians who joined the, carried out a terrible massacre of Jews in Vilijampolė ...the rioters in their bloody actions made no distinction between men and women, children and old. Their cruelty was limitless. They shot with bullets, they slaughtered with knives, they killed with axes...a house where some Jews found refuge was set on fire and the partisans did not permit the fireman who arrived to put out the fire. The miserable Jews were burned alive. People drowned in the Vilia [Neris] river...others were forced to dig the graves for themselves.”*¹⁶⁵

The Vilijampolė pogrom was followed by the Lietūkis Garage Massacre on June 27; while the exact number of victims is uncertain, it is estimated that around than sixty individuals were killed.¹⁶⁶ Several eyewitness accounts claim that Nazi soldiers actively participated in the humiliation and beatings of Jews during this massacre; however, the majority of accounts confirm that Lithuanians were the perpetrators. A witness, Leonardas Survila remembered:

¹⁶³ Nikžentaitis, *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)*, 178.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *Lietuvos Žydų Persekiojimas Ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą IR rudenį: Šaltiniai Ir analizė = the Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941*, 34.

“I saw 5 or 6 young men at the garage grounds. They had their coats off. They were beating men of Jewish nationality with rubber hoses and metal crowbars. The flooring of the garage yard was covered with maimed corpses, and heavily watered in blood. Those men grabbed the ones brought in by the hair, pushed them around, beat their heads with crowbars, and poured water on them with the ware supply hose that was used for washing cars. That was how they tortured the victims until they died. I saw a group of German soldiers and officers at the edge of the grounds, but they did not beat the Jews. I did not recognize a single one of those men, who were torturing citizens of Jewish nationality. I remember that one of them played accordion.”¹⁶⁷

A key factor of the initiation of anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania was the fact that the Germans managed to draw relatively high rates of local participation.¹⁶⁸ According to Arūnas Bubnys, “this can be explained by the fact that unlike western and central European countries Lithuania experienced the Soviet occupation before the Nazi occupation...pain inflicted during the Soviet occupation made a large part of the Lithuanian population enemies of Bolshevism and supporters of Germany.”¹⁶⁹ Nazi leadership tactfully exploited Lithuanian anti-Soviet sentiment in order to encourage *white armbanders* to initiate pogroms against Lithuanian Jewish communities. Essentially, “the first massacres of Lithuanian Jews were initiated by the German Security Police, but they were carried out mainly by Lithuanians.”¹⁷⁰ Arguably, the anti-Jewish violence that broke out during the initial days of the war a result of a mixture of LAF propaganda and Nazi exploitation; while Škirpa managed to mobilization partisan units with his nationalistic rhetoric, it was the successful Nazi exploitation of Lithuanian anti-Soviet attitudes that brought Lithuanian antisemitism to its zenith.

3.4 Justifying Violence: Themes of *Į Laisvę*

Furthermore, public perception played an integral part in the escalation of violence – without strong uproars from Lithuanians, *white armbanders* were justified in their actions. Significantly, the LAF founded the newspaper *Į Laisvę* (Toward Freedom) on June 24, 1941, which was a

¹⁶⁷ Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 188.

¹⁶⁸ Nikžentaitis, *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)*, 214.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷⁰ Stasiulis, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: The Key Characteristics of Its History, and the Key Issues in Historiography and Cultural Memory”, 266.

direct extension of Škirpa's antisemitic ideology.¹⁷¹ The newspaper was active between 1941 – 1942 and initially printed 90 thousand daily copies.¹⁷² While the rate of publications eventually declined due to material shortages caused by the war, in 1941 *I Laisvę* managed to publish 161 issues with a total of 200,000 copies; therefore, the influence on Lithuanians was considerable.¹⁷³ Arguably, *I Laisvę* was a source of indoctrination for ethnic Lithuanians, as it constantly published antisemitic statements. Moreover, it glorified the Wehrmacht as Lithuania's liberators, and as a result, Lithuanians were more willing to accept Nazi activities within the nation. Additionally, *I Laisvę* constantly reminded ethnic Lithuanians of their suffering and who was to blame – Bolshevik Jews. However, there has been great debate over how much freedom the Lithuanian press had during the Nazi occupation. Some historians, such as Alfonsas Eidintas, argue that the Lithuanian newspapers were forced to collaborate with the Nazi propaganda machine, and were not an 'initiator of anti-Semitism.'¹⁷⁴ Similarly, historian Valentinas Brandišauskas claims that the Lithuanian press cannot be held responsible for the publication of anti-Semitic material since all publications were submitted to the Nazi authorities for censorship.¹⁷⁵ In contrast, historian Algis Kasparavičius argues that newspapers were dependent on the will of the editors, and the political leaders that supported them.¹⁷⁶ However, Jurgis Bobelis, the LAF leader in Kaunas, was only ordered to submit all publications for pre-censorship to the press unit of the Propaganda Company on June 30, 1941. Therefore, to remedy this debate, only the publications of *I Laisvę* issued between June 24 – 23, 1941, in particular issues nr. 1, 2, 4, and 5 are discussed vis-à-vis the themes that it diverged to the population.

Arguably, *I Laisvę* was tactfully used to suppress pro-Jewish resistance amongst ethnic Lithuanians. According to Huang and Cruz, "even if propaganda does not directly influence people's beliefs, it can still make them less willing to protest if they believe that propaganda has successfully persuaded or intimidated other people not to protest."¹⁷⁷ In other words, successful propaganda does not necessarily influence individual preferences, rather it isolates them into

¹⁷¹ Bražiūnas, "The Darkest Page in the History of Lithuanian Journalism: Anti-Semitism in Legal Press During the Second Half of 1941", 124.

¹⁷² Ibid., 127.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 121.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Haifeng Huang and Nicholas Cruz, "Propaganda, Presumed Influence, and Collective Protest," *Political Behavior*, August 2021, 2.

thinking others have been influenced.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, propaganda is powerful not only on an individual level, but also on a collective level.¹⁷⁹ Significantly, *I Laisvę* championed themes of scapegoating, which aroused a social panic within Lithuanians. Essentially, this social panic created a lingering atmosphere of fear in which violence became necessary. For instance, the inaugural issue of *I Laisvę*, published June 24, announces in bold: “Jews, for whom communism has been the best means of exploiting and controlling others, are hastily fleeing, because Bolshevism and Jews are one and the same inseparable entity.”¹⁸⁰

Similarly, issue nr.2, published on June 25, defines a clear enemy: “still we stood unarmed in front of the oppressor, the Russians and the sneaky exploiters, parasites the Jews. They had eaten the fattest mouthful, built a palace, murdered us. Their hour is also up, and justice will control their rage and suppress their unquenchable appetites.”¹⁸¹ Issue nr. 5, published on June 28, prominently features a photograph of Adolf Hitler, with the headline “Our Fight with the World’s Enemy”, with an excerpt from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* underneath.¹⁸² Notably, the first point reads: “The fight against Jewish Bolshevism of the world requires a clear attitude towards the Soviet Union. The devil cannot be cast out.”¹⁸³ The action of scapegoating is crucial; as Staub suggests, scapegoating diminishes responsibility and “allows people to feel connected.”¹⁸⁴ Moreover, scapegoating allows “retaliation” to occur because these groups are perceived as deserving of the suffering.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, *I Laisvę* heavily relied on the theme of martyrdom to further villainize Lithuanian Jews. Issue nr. 4., published June 27, concentrated on Lithuanian partisan sacrifice as the ultimate sign of national devotion. The main headline declares: “Hundreds and thousands of volunteers are determined to rather die than be slaves.”¹⁸⁶ The reference of *slaves* is deliberately used to perpetuate the idea that Jews enslaved Lithuania and were the true force behind Soviet repression.

The issue also heavily centers around the theme of sacrifice and loss. Regarding the activities of the Kaunas partisans, the issue unambiguously states: “Lithuanian partisans, sacrificing

¹⁷⁸ Haifeng Huang and Nicholas Cruz, “Propaganda, Presumed Influence, and Collective Protest”, 2.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *I Laisvę*, June 24, 1941, 1, <https://elibrary.mab.lt/handle/1/22975>.

¹⁸¹ *I Laisvę*, June 25, 1941, 2, <https://elibrary.mab.lt/handle/1/22975>.

¹⁸² *I Laisvę*, June 28, 1941, 5, <https://elibrary.mab.lt/handle/1/22975>.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Staub, *The Roots of Evil the Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸⁶ *I Laisvę*, June 27, 1941, 4, <https://elibrary.mab.lt/handle/1/22975>.

themselves, managed to save nearly all of the important buildings in Vilijampolė from the bombings and sabotage of the Soviet soldiers – both communists and Jews. Partisans have begun to cleanse the city of hidden Bolshevik soldiers, Jews and other hostile elements often armed with not only guns, but also machine guns...the partisan's mission was heavily interrupted, because of the frequent barrage coming from the apartments of Jews and communists...The fight was horrible. It resembled a massacre more than a fight.”¹⁸⁷ Uncoincidentally, issue nr. 4 manages to create a grand spectacle out of the funeral held of the fallen partisans – “it is unfortunate to depart with our fallen heroes. However, our partisans fought and died as heroes so we must continue to remain strong and if necessary be willing to die for the goal. The goal of Lithuanian's independence.”¹⁸⁸ This image of sacrifice is powerful; it reinforces a nationalist identity and can justify further violence against this enemy.¹⁸⁹ The themes of scapegoating and martyrdom employed by *I Laisvę* were used to demonize Lithuanian Jews, to rationalize violence, and create a sense of national unity in order to shut down any notions of disapproval.

¹⁸⁷ *I Laisvę*, June 27, 1941, 4, <https://elibrary.mab.lt/handle/1/22975>.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Michaela DeSoucey et al., “Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom,” *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 100.

Chapter 4. The Holocaust in Lithuania

As mentioned, the Holocaust in Lithuania is defined by the relatively high rates of local participation and the alarming rate in which it was accomplished. As Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis note, “the persecution and killing of the Jews began within hours of the Nazi invasion of Lithuania...by the end of June, within a week of the outbreak of war, Jews already constituted a conspicuously large number, if not the majority, of civilians killed during the initial phase of the German-Soviet conflict.”¹⁹⁰ Moreover, by December 1941, 80 percent of Lithuanian’s Jew population were murdered.¹⁹¹ While the executions were initiated by the German Security Police and SD, it was the *white armbanders* that carried out the killings.¹⁹² As Holocaust survivor Sara Ginaitė later recalled, “not all *white armbanders* were Jew shooters, but during those days, all Jew shooters wore white armbands, they were *white armbanders*.”¹⁹³ However, this begs the question, *what* motivated the *white armbanders* to participate in the violence against Jews during the Holocaust? While LAF leaders were successful in creating a war conducive atmosphere in Lithuania, this chapter examines the relationship between *white armbanders* and the Wehrmacht to outline the evolution of motives that contributed to the Lithuanian Holocaust. Arguably, there were various motivations that contributed to the participation of violence – while some partisan unit members gave their oath to Hitler, others sought to seize Jewish property, such as clothing and jewelry.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, partisan testimonies are analyzed in order to gain insights into the Lithuanian perpetrator mentality. Moreover, bystander behavior is explored to understand the impact ethnic Lithuanians had on the Holocaust.

4.1 The Killing Fields: Lithuanian-Nazi Collaboration

According to Alex J. Kay, the Nazi perceived war as a “means to enable further waves of mass killings” and, therefore, would require local manpower throughout the remainder of WWII.¹⁹⁵ Essentially, Nazi leadership would reform Lithuanian partisan groups into units under their

¹⁹⁰ Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *Lietuvos Žydų Persekiojimas Ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą IR rudenį: Šaltiniai Ir analizė = the Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941*, 1.

¹⁹¹ Nikžentaitis, *Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (on the Boundary of Two Worlds; 1)*, 177.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁹³ Stasiulis, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: The Key Characteristics of Its History, and the Key Issues in Historiography and Cultural Memory”, 265.

¹⁹⁴ Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 227.

¹⁹⁵ Alex J. Kay, *Empire of Destruction: A History of Nazi Mass Killing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021): 35.

command. Therefore, the disarmament of the insurgents began on June 28, 1941; military commander Jurgis Bobelis issued an order for the demobilization of partisans and the reorganization of Lithuanian Police Battalions. In total, twenty-five battalions were formed and often consisted of former partisans, the National Labour Service Battalion (TDA), armed detachments of the LAF and deserted Red Army soldiers.¹⁹⁶ The purpose of these battalions was to support the Nazi military administration with supplementary functions such as “maintaining order, ensuring security of military objects, and guarding prisoners or war.”¹⁹⁷ Of the battalions formed, the 1st Battalion and 2nd Battalion were the most active in Jewish executions. The 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion was formed within the scope of the TDA on June 18, 1941.¹⁹⁸ Comprising of five companies, the 1st and 3rd Companies of the TDA were the most notorious for participating in the execution of Jews.¹⁹⁹ While the 1st Company operated primarily in Kaunas, the 3rd Company executed shootings both in Kaunas and throughout Lithuanian provinces.²⁰⁰ The TDA was initially signed under the command of Andrius Butkūnas, with a total of 724 non-commission officers and soldiers.²⁰¹ Historian Arūnas Bubnys suggests that “although the battalion, first and foremost, was assigned the functions to guard military and economic entities, it soon became involved in the Jewish execution operation on the initiative of the German Security Police and SD.”²⁰²

The command of the TDA was eventually transferred to Commander of Staff SS Obersturmbannführer of special detachment No. 1b, Erich Ehrlinger, who promptly began to issue the arrests and mass execution of Jews at the Kaunas 7th Fort.²⁰³ Ehrlinger would lead massacres in Kaunas between 29 June – 1 July 1941, resulting in 1,500 Jews killed.²⁰⁴ On July 2 1941, Ehrlinger was replaced by the Commander of the 3rd Company of the Operational Task Force A, SS Standartenführer Karl Jäger.²⁰⁵ Under the leadership of Karl Jäger, the TDA Battalion was reformed into a battalion with the sole purpose of conducting executions. The first

¹⁹⁶ Arūnas Bubnys, “Lithuanian Police Battalions and the Holocaust (1941-1943),” *The International Commission*, 2001, 4.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

executions took place between July 4 – 6, in which 2,977 Jews were executed at the 7th Fort.²⁰⁶ According to reports, both TDA Battalion, primary 1st and 3rd Companies, were recruited to participate in executions between July – December 1941, leading to the death of approximately 26 thousand Jews at the Kaunas Forts.²⁰⁷ However, reports indicate that desertion and dismissal was common amongst the TDA Battalion; between 5 – 17 July 1941, a total of 117 soldiers were dismissed from military service and 9 soldiers deserted the TDA Battalion.²⁰⁸ The Commander of the 1st Company of the TDA Battalion, Bronius Kirkila, unable to withstand the executions, committed suicide on July 12, 1941.²⁰⁹ Other high ranking military officials, such as Lieut. Stepas Paulauskas, Lieut. Povilas Kulakauskas, and Lieut. Jonas Ralys resigned.²¹⁰

With the exception of executions in Kaunas, Vilnius, and Šiauliai, the majority of Jewish massacres can be attributed to the orders of SS Obershturmführer Joachim Hamann and his *flying squads*. As Jäger asserted, “the extermination of the Jews of Lithuania could be completed only thanks to the flying squads formed of selected men and led by Obershturmführer Hamann who fully understood my goals and was capable of ensuring cooperation with Lithuanian partisans and corresponding civil authorities.”²¹¹ These *flying squads*, consisting of members from the German Security Police and SD, were formed solely for the “mass killing of the Jews and the communists” and were active primarily in provincial Lithuania.²¹² Additionally, several volunteers from the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion were often assigned to the *flying squad*.²¹³ According to reports, the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion participated in *flying squad* executions in Alytus, Ariogala, Babtai, Butrimonys, Garliava, Jieznas, Krakės, Lazdijai, Pasvalys, Petrašiūnai, Rumšiškės, Seirijai, Simnas, and Vilkija.²¹⁴ These killings alone resulted in the death of 11,598 Jews; however, it is likely that the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion participated in additional executions.²¹⁵ Furthermore, the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion assisted the German Gestapo and provincial *white armbanders* in the execution of approximately

²⁰⁶ Arūnas Bubnys, “Lithuanian Police Battalions and the Holocaust (1941-1943), 9.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

39,000 Jews.²¹⁶ Therefore, Bubnys concludes that the 3rd Company of the TDA Battalion plausibly contributed to the execution of 60,000 Jews in 1941.²¹⁷ Between 1942 – 1945, there are no records of the 1st Lithuanian Police Battalion participating in the extermination of Jews in Lithuania.²¹⁸

On August 7, 1941, the 2nd Lithuanian Police Battalion was formed under the command of Antanas Impulevičius, and consisted in part of officers and soldiers transferred from the 1st Battalion.²¹⁹ In total, the 2nd Battalion included 505 soldiers and was divided into three companies.²²⁰ Initially, the 2nd Battalion was stationed at the Šančiai barracks in Kaunas, with the purpose of protecting “objects of military significance” and guarding prisoners of war incarcerated at Zapyškis and Pagelažiai peatbogs near Kaunas.²²¹ However, on October 6, 1941, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to relocate to the Minsk region of Belarus to “cleanse the area from the remaining Bolshevik Army and Bolshevik partisans.”²²² The activities of the 2nd Battalion often included punishment operations and the execution of civilians – mostly Jews.²²³ While executions were led by German officers, the shootings were performed entirely by the 2nd Battalion.²²⁴ It is estimated that between October – December 1941, the 2nd Battalion in cooperation with German forces executed 46 thousand civilians; according to Bubnys, “the absolute majority of these victims were Jews.”²²⁵ Similar to the TDA Battalion, the 2nd Battalion did not participate in executions between 1942 – 1944, and was primarily used to guard military objects in Belarus.²²⁶ When the 2nd Battalion returned to Lithuania in February 1944, it was immediately disarmed and dissolved by German authorities in Tauragė.²²⁷

As concluded by Bubnys, the 1st and 2nd Battalions were systematically and largely involved in the executions of the Jews in Lithuania and Belarus.²²⁸ Battalions whose involvement is categorized as ‘episodic’ include: Kaunas 3rd, 4th, and 252nd Battalions; Vilnius 1st, 2nd, and 3rd

²¹⁶ Arūnas Bubnys, “Lithuanian Police Battalions and the Holocaust (1941-1943), 14.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 15.

²²¹ Ibid., 14.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 15.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid., 16.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 32.

Battalions, Šiauliai 14th Battallion; Panevėžys 10th Battalion.²²⁹ The activities of these battalions primarily consisted of “guarding the places of executions, escorting Jews to executions, and guarding ghettos and concentration camps.”²³⁰ Moreover, these battalions only participated in a few executions throughout the Holocaust. Battalions that did not participate in the Holocaust include Kaunas 5th, 8th, and 9th Battalions; Vilnius 4th, 6th, 250th, 251st, 253rd, 254th, 255th, 256th, 257th, 258th, and 259th Battalions.²³¹ Regarding Vilnius 15th Battalion, its participation in the execution of Jews in Belarus in 1941 remains unclear.²³² Therefore, out of the twenty-five Lithuanian Police Battalions formed, ten battalions were active in the Holocaust and fourteen did not participate.²³³ It is estimated that 1,000 Lithuanian soldiers either directly participated in the execution of Jews or guarded the victims, resulting in participation in approximately 78,000 Jewish murders in Lithuania and Belarus throughout 1941 – this estimate excludes victims of other nationalities and Soviet prisoners of war.²³⁴ While the amount of Jews executed in such a short time period by Lithuanians is appalling, the fact that there are no records of members participating in shootings after 1941 raises the question of whether Lithuanian perpetrators were ideologists or individuals motivated by external factors. If ideologically driven, would Lithuanian perpetrators have stopped so abruptly? In turn, what would account for such radicalized murder during the uprising?

4.2 ‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Willing Executioners’? Testimonies of Lithuanian Perpetrators

As concluded by Browning, “war, a struggle between ‘our people’ and the ‘enemy’ creates a polarized world in which ‘the enemy’ is easily objectified and removed from the community of human obligation...war is the most conducive environment in which governments can adopt ‘atrocious by policy’ and encounter few difficulties in implementing it.”²³⁵ Regarding participation in the Holocaust, Browning refers to Staub’s conclusion on what leads to individuals committing extreme violence and the destruction of human life.²³⁶ Staub argues that “ordinary psychological processes and normal, common human motivations and certain basic but not inevitable tendencies in human thought and feeling are the primary sources of the human capacity to for

²²⁹ Arūnas Bubnys, “Lithuanian Police Battalions and the Holocaust (1941-1943), 31.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., 32.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and The Final Solution in Poland* (2017): 237.

²³⁶ Ibid., 244

mass destruction of human life...evil that arises out of ordinary thinking and is committed by ordinary people is the norm, not the exception.”²³⁷ Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that individuals ‘slip’ into societal roles that are provided; according to Bauman, individuals who have the capacity to resist authority and assert moral autonomy are rare.²³⁸ Therefore, Bauman maintains that “cruelty is social in its origin and much more than it is characterological.”²³⁹ In his research, Browning determines that the massacre of Jews was primarily carried out by ‘ordinary men’, who were “largely motivated by mundane concerns for acceptance and conformity within a larger group.”²⁴⁰ These ‘ordinary men’ were not motivated by “ideology hatred” or “fanatical adherence to National Socialism”, but were instead guided by “respect and deference to authority”, “concern for career advancement”, and “peer group pressure.”²⁴¹

When examining testimonies of Lithuanian perpetrators, the various motivations become clear; seemingly, individuals were motivated primarily by either personal gain or pressure, rather than ideological impulses. Unfortunately, within the collection, there are not many interviews with former *white armbanders* and the ones that do exist need to be regarded with skepticism. Nevertheless, the few interviews do shed an important light on the impetus of Lithuanian perpetrator behavior. As noted by Browning, ‘obeying orders’ have traditionally been the most frequently cited source for perpetrator participation.²⁴² A prime example of this in regard to Lithuanian participation is the interview with former volunteer Juozas Aleksnys. Discussing the execution of Jews, Aleksnys grimly asserts that shootings happened “in every single city...wherever they [Germans] brought us, there would be executions...I witnessed around ten.”²⁴³ Regarding his own participation, Aleksnys sorrowfully explains that “we [Lithuanians] had to round up the Jews ourselves and then shoot in shifts.”²⁴⁴ When asked if individuals could refuse to participate in an execution, Aleksnys responds that “individuals had absolutely no right to refuse...if you mentioned that your chest is hurting, or your heart, during an execution, a German would quickly come up and check your pulse or your temperature...then they would yell

²³⁷ Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and The Final Solution in Poland*, 244.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Edward B. Westermann, “‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Ideological Soldiers’? Police Battalion 310 in Russia, 1942,” *German Studies*, 42

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and The Final Solution in Poland*, 248.

²⁴³ Aleksynas, Juozas. “Oral history interview with Juozas Aleksynas.” By Saulius Beržinis, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508564>.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

‘*Gut, los!*’ and you would stand in line...that’s it.”²⁴⁵ However, Browning argues that there is no evidence that the “refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable fire punishment.”²⁴⁶ Similarly, Vanagaitė and Dieckmann point out that there are no accounts of Lithuanian officers and soldiers receiving punishment for refusing to participate in shootings.²⁴⁷

Furthermore, there are recollections in which partisans refused to participate in the executions. In an interview, partisan unit leader Juozas Mozūraitis describes fighting in Vilijampolė. Mozūraitis recounts that on the evening of the Vilijampolė pogrom, partisan units in Kaunas were informed that there was a substantial battle in Vilijampolė against the Red Army and were directed to guard the bridges and post offices.²⁴⁸ Mozūraitis claims that while they were guarding the Vilijampolė bridge, a Wehrmacht commander ordered Mozūraitis’ unit to execute a group of Jews gathered in a nearby field.²⁴⁹ When asked about the group, Mozūraitis answers: “...I saw men, I saw women...I also saw the Gestapo.”²⁵⁰ Mozūraitis self-righteously continues to describe the Gestapo as “beastly” and explains that their purpose was to “evoke fear and to make us tremble.”²⁵¹ Nonetheless, Mozūraitis refused to give the order to execute the Jews, which infuriated the Wehrmacht commander.²⁵² The interviewer asks Mozūraitis if any members from his unit participated in the execution, and he responds that, “when the commander asked if there are volunteers, one unit member offered.”²⁵³ Mozūraitis describes the execution as “horrendous” and claims that he questioned the *white armbanders* he had returned – “what have Jews ever done to you?”²⁵⁴ Accordingly, he responded, “Captain, do you not understand the Gestapo? If none of us would have gone, they would have taken us all around the corner, killed us, and claimed that we were communists!”²⁵⁵

²⁴⁵ Aleksynas, Juozas. “Oral history interview with Juozas Aleksynas.” By Saulius Beržinis, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508564>.

²⁴⁶ Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and The Final Solution in Poland*, 194.

²⁴⁷ Dieckmann and Vanagaitė, *How Did It Happen?: Understanding the Holocaust*, 20.

²⁴⁸ Mozūraitis, Juozas. “Oral history interview with Juozas Mozūraitis.” By Saulius Beržinis, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn509526>

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Mozūraitis, Juozas. “Oral history interview with Juozas Mozūraitis.” By Saulius Beržinis, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn509526>

Similar memories of *white armbanders* refusing to participate in Jewish executions are found in other testimonies. Alfonsas Vencpolis, a *white armbander*, recalls joining the partisans before the war to “help force the Red Army out of Lithuania. We did not want to help the Wehrmacht; we were only thinking about Lithuania.”²⁵⁶ Furthermore, Vencpolis apologetically explains that “Lithuanians lived peacefully with Jews before the war...no one would have thought that Jews would be executed like that...like animals...forced into a pit and shot.”²⁵⁷ Vencpolis firmly insists to have not taken part in any Jewish executions and when asked what happened to Jewish property, Vencpolis claims that “activists stole it to either give away or destroy.”²⁵⁸ Purportedly, the potential of gaining Jewish property was a key motivator for Lithuanian perpetrators. In an interview with former *white armbander* Izadorius Klabys, Klabys claims to have not even known about Jewish executions until after the fact.²⁵⁹ Klabys only realized that his fellow unit members went out to shoot Jews when poor partisans returned “wearing leather jackets...then we knew that they had earned these items by shooting.”²⁶⁰ When asked if the partisans would discuss the executions amongst each other, Klabys responds, “They would talk! Even boasted that they would receive drinks.”²⁶¹ From these accounts, it seems that the looting of Jewish property was the primary motivator for *white armbanders*. For one, many local witnesses claim to have observed Lithuanian collaborators taking Jewish property either for themselves or to sell. For example, Kazimieras Liubšys remembers the organized looting and auctioning of Jewish property by local collaborators.²⁶²

However, some members of partisan units denied the participation of Lithuanians in Jewish executions. In an interview with former LAF member and *white armbander* Aleksandras Bendinskas, Bendinskas details his memories of this uprising. In a rather aggressive manner, Bendinskas asserts that “I did not see any instances where a Jew would be a target...we were educated in the nationalist spirit – to fight for better in Lithuania. But to go and kill – I do not

²⁵⁶ Vencpolis, Alfonsas. “Oral history interview with Alfonsas Vencpolis.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/im509526>

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Klabys, Izidoras. “Oral history interview with Izidoras Klabys.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/im45263>

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Liubšys, Kazimieras. “Oral history interview with Kazimieras Liubšys.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/im518533>

know; this did not exist in my surroundings.”²⁶³ Initially former *white armbander*, Idelfonas Bičkus, also maintains that “the arriving Germans would tell us that Jews had done horrible things to us...that Jews hid Soviet soldiers...they demanded that Jews should be rounded up and liquidated...but our captain, Pertrauskas, told us that this is not our purpose...we have no anger.”²⁶⁴ Yet, after some prodding by the interview, Bičkus continues to remember how Pertrauskas was swiftly replaced by Venckus, who organized “the rounding up of Jews within a few weeks...those Jews were later liquidated.”²⁶⁵ Regarding Jewish property, Bičkus describes how “there was so much Jewish looting...people stole furniture...there was no order...people stole bedding, clothing.”²⁶⁶ When asked whether he stole any Jewish property, Bičkus uncomfortably responds, “...there was a Jewish wagon and a chair...I brought home the chair, nothing else...”²⁶⁷ Finally, when asked if he believed that Nazi Germany would grant Lithuania independence, Bičkus responds, “yes, without a doubt!”²⁶⁸ In an interview with Leonas Stonkus, when asked if members who volunteered to shoot received any extra benefits for their participation, Stonkus responds with hesitation, “Well...yes...there was a predetermined sum...a monetary sum.”²⁶⁹ Stonkus continues by alleging that “every job had a price.”²⁷⁰ In response to the question of which jobs paid the most, Stonkus confirms – “Shooting Jews.”²⁷¹

Therefore, motivation for participating in shootings varied amongst perpetrators. According to Jan Grabowski, “local institutions and individuals – simple people – became in a variety of ways complicit with the Germans...most were animated by antisemitism, although various other justifications were offered later to explain the heinous acts...it was their participation that, in a number of ways, made the German system of murder as efficient as it was.”²⁷² Seemingly local Lithuanian collaborators acted according to their own agenda rather than within the context of

²⁶³ Bendinskas, Aleksandras. “Oral history interview with Aleksandras Bendinskas.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn518270>

²⁶⁴ Bičkus, Idelfonas. “Oral history interview with Idelfonas Bičkus.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45264>

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Stonkus, Leonas. “Oral history interview with Leonas Stonkus.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508577>

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Jan Grabowski, *The Polish Police: Collaboration in the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 2017): 28.

Hitler's ideological goal.²⁷³ Patriotic engagement led to the participation in Jewish executions, but so did looting Jewish property. Furthermore, while ideology played a motivating role, greed, opportunism and fear were powerful secondary motivations.²⁷⁴ Moreover, Staub suggests that “the motivation to obey often comes from a *desire* to follow a leader, to be a good member of a group, to show respect for authority...guided by shared cultural dispositions, the shared experience of difficult life conditions, shared motivations that result from them, and shared inclinations for ways to satisfy motives, people *join* rather than simply obey out of fear or respect.”²⁷⁵ While ideology contributed to the motivations, arguably Lithuanian perpetrators often participated in Jewish executions because of a desire to obey and the potential of material gain.

4.3 The Spectrum of Violence: The Bystander Behavior

This section examines the various roles, outside of perpetrators, assumed by local Lithuanians. According to Staub, “as violence between groups, or by one group against another, intensifies – and as the members of a group become increasingly committed to their ideology and thus to the destruction of the other group – they are less and less likely to shift course on their own...only witnesses or bystanders can stop the evolution of increasing violence...unfortunately, bystanders usually remain passive.”²⁷⁶ As a result, their passivity affirms the perpetrators and their actions.²⁷⁷ Staub focuses on the relationship between perpetrators, victims and bystanders. However, this concept of the bystander relies on an assumption of passivity and argues that bystanders were “ordinary people who ‘followed orders’ and who were otherwise on the sidelines and not directly involved in the creation or implementation of Nazi ideology and policy.”²⁷⁸ According to Raul Hilberg’s seminal research on responsibility in the Holocaust, bystanders played many roles – bankers, neighbors, train conductors – that assumed varying degrees of influence.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, he argued that several categories such as helpers, gainers,

²⁷³ Jan Grabowski, *The Polish Police: Collaboration in the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 2017): 25.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁷⁵ Ervin Staub, “Genocide and Mass Killing: Origins, Prevention, Healing and Reconciliation,” *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000): 371.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Victoria j Barnett, “The Changing View of the ‘Bystander’ in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications,” *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 635.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

collaborators, onlookers, and witnesses fall under the umbrella of ‘bystander behavior.’²⁸⁰

Michael Rothberg introduces a more nuanced concept of the *implicated subject*, individuals or communities who “occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes....an implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the position of victim and perpetrators.”²⁸¹

Moreover, Rothberg notes that the environment of “extreme violence generates a whole cast of characters marked by shades or degrees of complicity.”²⁸² Therefore, *implicated subject* is an umbrella term that “gathers a range of subject positions that sit uncomfortably in our familiar conceptual space of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.”²⁸³ Similarly, Victoria Barnett argues that ‘bystander behavior’ during the Holocaust was a “fluid process in which there was a gradual movement over time either toward complicity or resistance.”²⁸⁴ Omer Bartov asserts that the category of bystander becomes meaningless with the context of the Holocaust: “some who hide the persecuted also denounce them; some of the killers also shelter potential victims some of the collaborators turn to resistance. Claims of indifference or passivity appear absurd, unless they encompass watching one’s neighbors being shot, and then taking over their property.”²⁸⁵ Even so, that could be categorized with Holocaust participation. Therefore, bystander behavior is a complicated and often overlapping process in which individuals assume various roles within political conflict. An account by Ona Jaciunskiene demonstrates the overlapping roles a bystander can assume – in this case, both of onlooker and resister:

“We did not work on Sundays, so more people were gathered in the square than usual. The windows of our house faced the square. I noticed that something was happening. I ran out and saw German soldiers open the door and windows [of Jewish houses] with

²⁸⁰ Barnett, “The Changing View of the ‘Bystander’ in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications,” 636.

²⁸¹ Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020): 1.

²⁸² Violeta Davoliūtė, “The Gaze of the Implicated Subject: Non-Jewish Testimony to Communal Violence during the German Occupation of Lithuania,” *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* (2022): 5.

²⁸³ Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, 13.

²⁸⁴ Barnett, “The Changing View of the ‘Bystander’ in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications”, 639.

²⁸⁵ Stasiulis, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: The Key Characteristics of Its History, and the Key Issues in Historiography and Cultural Memory”, 265.

*gun barrels, shouting to crowds, 'go and take whatever you want.' Some went and took but others did not, they simply watched. I stood behind the crowds and watched to see what would happen. The Germans saw that some people were not taking anything, so they started carrying out either pillows or covers from the Jewish houses, throwing them towards those who were standing and watching. I stepped further and kept watching what was going on, what was happening. The Germans were throwing and throwing all sorts of clothing and the Jewish people were crying and shouting in their house. One young German took note of me, a young girl, poorly dressed in a homemade linen shirt and a black skirt. He brought a pillow to me. 'Take this,' he told me. I have studied German and understand what he said. 'Girl, take it!' I said 'No, I will not take it.' But several other people were stretching out their hands 'Give it to us!' The soldier took out his pistol and told them to step back. He once again told me to take the pillow. I said no."*²⁸⁶

Similarly, Anelė Mičiulienė remembers herself bleakly “sitting and watching” local Lithuanian collaborators – one of which was her brother-in-law.²⁸⁷ Initially, her testimony describes an onlooker, as she remembers how “in this evening I was sitting and watching; I was sitting and watching, I was lying and listening.”²⁸⁸ However, as the interview continues, Mičiulienė reveals various situations in which she displayed resistance. When encountering a *white armbander*, who she knew well, beating a group of Jews with his rifle, Mičiulienė shouted at him: “Vladas! [his name] I shouted; will this rifle not turn against you too one day?”²⁸⁹ Furthermore, she details how she managed to keep her husband from joining a local partisan unit: “My husband was urged to go shooting but I hid him; and he did not join. They wanted him to join the partisans, but I followed him everywhere, I would sit on the threshold and cry, for as long as they continued talking, until Miškinis, their leader, finally said: ‘Dismiss Misiūnas. He cannot get out from his wife’s skirt!’”²⁹⁰ Moreover, Mičiulienė explains how she “scolded” and “shamed” her sister for her husband’s involvement in the shootings.²⁹¹ Therefore, Mičiulienė is another prime

²⁸⁶ Davoliūtė, “The Gaze of the Implicated Subject: Non-Jewish Testimony to Communal Violence during the German Occupation of Lithuania”, 9.

²⁸⁷ Mičiulienė, Anelė. “Oral history interview with Anelė Mičiulienė.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45281>

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Mičiulienė, Anelė. “Oral history interview with Anelė Mičiulienė.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn45281>

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

example of overlapping degrees of ‘bystander behavior’ – while she spends moments observing situations from a background, other times she voices her disapproval and shames individuals who profited from Jewish murder.

Additionally, testimonies of overlapping ‘bystander behavior’ often include instances of local Lithuanians who attempted to help Jews within their own communities. In an interview with Elena Braškienė, Braškienė recalls attempts by villagers to hide a young Jew from Lithuanian perpetrators. With tearful eyes, Braškienė describes how her husband was forced to transport Jews to ghettos and how devastated he would be when he turned.²⁹² Moreover, Braškienė remembers how they accepted a young Jew nicknamed ‘Sroliukas’ into their homes and hid him for two weeks, before he was able to escape to relatives.²⁹³ With a smile, Braškienė rejoices that ‘Sroliukas’ survived the war and often visited their home.²⁹⁴ In another interview, Monika Lučinskienė remembers how her family hid two Jewish girls for three months and how both girls were able to survive at a relative’s house located in the countryside.²⁹⁵ However, Lučinskienė also regretfully recalls watching locals cover burial pits after Jewish executions.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, in an interview with Edvardas Cirtautas, Cirtautas remembers how townspeople would watch the transportation of Jewish men, women and children to the killing sites, but also how local Lithuanians would bring food to Jews imprisoned in the nearby ghetto.²⁹⁷ Additionally, Viktoras Vareikis describes his own overlapping ‘bystander behavior’ in which he would assist in digging graves to bury Jewish victims in after executions and witness shootings committed by local partisans in the forest.²⁹⁸ However, during a specific shooting, he describes noticing a Jew survive a shooting and later bringing the survivor water.²⁹⁹

Striking to these testimonies is the fact that almost all witnesses remember recognizing Jewish victims and local Lithuanian perpetrators – at times remembering the names and address. The violent events seem to be imprinted in their consciousness and therefore, arguably contradict the

²⁹² Braškienė, Elena. “Oral history interview with Elena Braškienė.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn523895>

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Vareikis, Viktoras. “Oral history interview with Viktoras Vareikis.” By Alicija Žukauskaitė, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508523>

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

traditional notion of passivity within ‘bystander behavior.’ As Davoliūtė concludes, ‘bystander behavior’ is a “complex, multifaceted and contradictory entanglements of subject positions situated between or beyond the opposed stance of perpetrator and victim.”³⁰⁰ As coined by Primo Levi, conditions of extreme violence create a “gray zone”, in which constraints and opportunities are a “function of the complex web of interdependencies at the local level of family and community.”³⁰¹ Within the context of the Lithuanian Holocaust, the “gray zone” was defined by intimidation, coercion, and personal gain.³⁰² However, it is important to note that the Lithuanian collective memory the Holocaust developed within the context of the second Soviet occupation (1944 – 1990), in which the Soviet Union portrayed itself as victorious and unwilling to bring these recollections forward. Furthermore, Lithuanian collective memory regarding the war was overshadowed by the re-introduction of Soviet mass deportations and repression; therefore, it developed inwards, remained isolated and focused on oppression as a distinct Lithuanian concept. As former exile Tomas Venclova concluded: “the sentiment of national identity brushed aside all social and individual distinctions and ensured a dramatic national consolidation that led Lithuania into independent existence.”³⁰³ Lithuanians were left unable to reconcile the events of the Holocaust and, therefore, the immediacy of these narratives was diminished within the Lithuanian perception of social violence and oppression.

³⁰⁰ Davoliūtė, “The Gaze of the Implicated Subject: Non-Jewish Testimony to Communal Violence during the German Occupation of Lithuania”, 16.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ Violeta Davoliūtė, “The Entanglement of Historical Experiences: The Memory of the Soviet Deportation of Lithuanian Jews,” *Ethnologie Française* 170, no. 2 (2018): 1.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

According to Snyder, the overlapping violence during the period between 1939 – 1945 in Eastern Europe produced ideal conditions for the progression of violence: “the double occupation, first Soviet, then German, made the experience of the inhabitants of these lands all the more complicated and dangerous. A single occupation can fracture a society for generations; double occupation is even more painful and divisive. It created risks and temptations that were unknown in the West.”³⁰⁴ Furthermore, national choices decided under one regime, had to be re-adapted for the next occupier, creating a disconnect between national identity and reality.³⁰⁵ As peace was not necessarily guaranteed, societies existed within a state of constant panic and were forced to adapt to situations rapidly. For ethnic Lithuanians, the departure of the Soviet Union in 1941 meant liberation; for Lithuanian Jewish communities it meant persecution.³⁰⁶ Therefore, evolution of anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania during the Soviet occupation resulted from a desire to regain national freedom at the expense of Lithuanian Jews. Moreover, rather than being subordinate to Hitler, Škirpa envisioned an independent Aryan nation in partnership with Nazi Germany. Having mobilized Lithuanian partisans, Škirpa permeated his antisemitic nationalistic ideas into the Lithuanian national consciousness, exploiting the difficult conditions of the Soviet occupation and scapegoating the Jewish communities. The deterioration of Lithuanian-Jewish relations occurred within an ideological context and was based on national resentment and collective humiliation. Staub asserts that “difficult life conditions and certain cultural characteristics generate psychological processes and motives that lead a group to turn against another group.”³⁰⁷ As perpetrators progress along a “continuum of destruction”, genocide becomes inevitable.³⁰⁸

However, Staub also concludes that all individuals have the capacity “to come to experience killing other people as nothing extraordinary.”³⁰⁹ The behavior of perpetrators is facilitated by external circumstances such as fear, manipulation, and greed. Regarding the Holocaust in Lithuania, archival testimonies suggest that local Lithuanian collaborators were not

³⁰⁴ Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, 473.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Staub, *The Roots of Evil the Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, 48.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

predominately motivated by ideological ambitions, rather perpetrators seemed more likely to participate in executions in order to gain material value – arguably, this could be connected to the interwar notion of Jews as greedy economic tyrants. Nevertheless, Staub argues that within the continuum of destructions the “deeply ingrained, social developed feelings of responsibility for others’ welfare and inhibitions against killing are gradually lost.”³¹⁰ Accordingly, perpetrator participation in political conflict depends on ‘bystander behavior’, as bystanders have the ability to either validate the actions of perpetrators or put a stop to them. However, as Rothberg concludes, ‘bystander behavior’ is a multi-fascinated and fluid ‘gray-zone’, which encompasses a variety of actions.³¹¹ Indeed, the overlapping and ever-changing roles that ethnic Lithuanians assumed is apparent in the collection of testimonies. An individual could assume both roles of onlooker and perpetrator, or perpetrator and savior. Overlapping ‘bystander behavior’ is a complicated, psychological concept in which the line between perpetrator and savior is blurred and the notion of responsibility is diffused. Responsibility is further minimized as individuals perceive themselves as victims as well. As collective memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania was defined by the subsequent Soviet occupation and the continuation of foreign repressive policies, Holocaust remembrance has been controversial. According to Davoliūtė, “the process of categorizing, separating, killing and moving people around had the effect of creating or consolidating collective subjectivities that recall ‘the war’ from the singular perspective traumatic events they suffered.”³¹²

A ‘return of memory’ occurred in Lithuania in the late 1980s as a means to de-legitimize the Soviet regime, in which the first deportee memoirs of Soviet Lithuania were published.³¹³ The concept of repression became part of the Lithuanian national identity, and the term ‘genocide’ became synonymous with the “suffering of the Lithuanian nation at the hands of the Soviet occupying power.”³¹⁴ Simultaneously, Lithuanian collective memory experienced a re-emergence of the myth of ‘double genocide’ – the idea that the Holocaust was a “just return for their role in the ‘genocide’ of Lithuanians through Soviet deportation.”³¹⁵ Furthermore, the study

³¹⁰ Staub, *The Roots of Evil the Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, 53.

³¹¹ Michael Rothberg, “Multidirectional Memory,” *Témoigner. Entre Histoire Et Mémoire*, no. 119 (2014): 39.

³¹² Violeta Davoliūtė, “The Entanglement of Historical Experiences: The Memory of the Soviet Deportation of Lithuanian Jews”, 2.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

of Lithuanian-Nazi collaboration has suffered from tendencies to “either narrow or broaden concepts of collaborations for partisan purposes.”³¹⁶ Regarded as national heroes, Lithuanian partisans have been the symbol of the Lithuanian anti-Soviet movement, and therefore, cannot be untarnished in the Lithuanian national consciousness. According to Rothberg, these two distinct memories of extreme violence demonstrated the “jagged” borders of memory and identity: “memories crowd each other out of the public sphere – too much emphasis on the Holocaust is said to marginalize other traumas or, inversely, adoption of Holocaust rhetoric to speak of other traumas is said to relativize or over deny the Holocaust’s uniqueness.”³¹⁷ Therefore, for further research the topic of post-WWII Holocaust memory development in Lithuanian and its link to current Holocaust denial issues is proposed. Moreover, a discussion of controversies regarding Lithuanian national monuments and street names, and conflict they create within national memories, is suggested – an example of this would be the 2019 decision to change a Vilnius street name originally dedicated to Škirpa despite heated protests and a collective refusal to perceive Škirpa as anything but a national hero despite evidence to suggest otherwise.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Joachim Tauber and Saulius Sužiedėlis, “Lithuanian Collaboration during the Second World War: Past Realities, Present Perceptions,” in “Kollaboration” in Nordosteuropa Erscheinungsformen Und Deutungen Im 20. Jahrhundert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006): 141.

³¹⁷ Rothberg, “Multidirectional Memory,” *Témoigner. Entre Histoire Et Mémoire*, 176.

³¹⁸ Delfi, “Vilnius Decides to Rename Skirpa Street despite Protests,” DELFI (DELFI, August 7, 2019), <https://www.delfi.lt/en/politics/vilnius-decides-to-rename-skirpa-street-despite-protests.d?id=81812397>.

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